

The You I've Never Known Study Guide

The You I've Never Known by Ellen Hopkins

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Plot Summary

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The You I've Never Known is a young adult novel by Ellen Hopkins. Told in verse, the story follows seventeen year-old Ariel Pearson as she explores her sexuality. Ariel learns that the nomadic life she has lived with her father has been an abusive existence based on lies. It is not the loving, caring relationship that her father claims. When the novel begins, Ariel and her dad, Mark, have come to live in Sonora, California. They have been there for over a year, which is the longest amount of time that they have ever stayed in one place. Ariel is tall, pretty, and loving. Her goal in life is to please her father, who is prone to drinking and rages. Ariel has traveled throughout the country with her father since she was a toddler. According to her father, her mother abandoned them both for a woman. Because of this, Ariel hates her mother and seeks to love her father despite his flaws.

In Sonora, Ariel is best friends with Syrah and Monica, the latter for whom Ariel has romantic feelings. Dad seems content to stay in Sonora because he has a job as an auto mechanic that he likes. He also has a steady girlfriend named Zelda. It is through Zelda that Ariel meets Zelda's nephew, Gabe. Ariel and Gabe hit things off quickly, and Ariel begins to wonder if she is straight, gay, or bisexual. She becomes sexually involved with both Monica and Gabe, seeking to figure out just where she stands.

While on a drive, Gabe and Ariel come across the unconscious form of Ariel's basketball teammate and friend from school, the wealthy Hillary Grantham, who has fallen while riding her horse. Gabe and Ariel stop and call for help. The paramedics arrive. They tell Gabe and Ariel that Hillary would have died without help. This begins a genuine friendship between Hillary and Ariel. It also earns the attention of Hillary's father, Charles Grantham, who is running for State Attorney General. The media is alerted to what has happened, and news stations and papers carry the story. This enrages Ariel's dad, but Ariel cannot understand why.

Weeks later, after a basketball tournament, Ariel is confronted by two women. One of the women is tall and looks like Ariel. The other woman is shorter with spiky hair. They have found Ariel because of the press coverage. The woman explains she is Maya, Ariel's mother. She also tells her that Ariel's real name is Casey and Casey was kidnapped fifteen years ago. Finally, Ariel's dad's real name is Jason. Ariel is stunned. Her dad denies this at first. Later, he admits to parts of it being true. He curses out Ariel before they pack to leave town.

Ariel is shocked by all she has heard, but she agrees to meet with Maya again because she is determined to know the truth about everything. At the same time, Gabe begins dating Hillary, which leaves Ariel free to commit to Monica. Ariel realizes she must be brave and begin doing the right things in life.



Maya gifts Ariel with a journal recounting the events of the past fifteen years. The journal recounts that Maya married the much-older Jason to get away from her crazy, Scientology-obsessed mother and that Maya was in love with her best friend, a girl named Tati (whom she later married). The journal reveals that Jason became a controlling, alcoholic who was abusive. Things between Jason and her had become especially intense after 9/11, which was just before his military unit was set to deploy. When he discovered that Maya was going to move in with Tati while he was away, he picked Casey up from daycare. Then, he disappeared. For fifteen years, Maya and Tati tried to find Casey. Then, they learned about Hillary's life being saved in the news. The journal ends with Maya's declaration that she will find a way to get Casey back in her life.



Pages 1 – 126

Summary

A narrator begins by wishing for the gifts of the chameleon –to adapt and see two ways.

Ariel – Almost-seventeen year-old Ariel Pearson and her Dad, an Army veteran named Mark, have moved around frequently since she was little. She longs for a place to truly call home, where she can feel safe, accepted, and be herself. Despite this, Ariel knows she has seen beautiful sights across the country, such as the Grand Canyon and Niagara Falls. Dad becomes angry with Ariel for wanting a home, accusing her of wanting to run off and leave him like her mother did. He usually says this while he is drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. Her dad tells her he is raising her as he was raised. As they travel, Dad uses an atlas to decide where they will go. They come to live in Sonora, California. They live in Sonora for over a year, which is the longest time that they have lived in one place. Ariel has just started her junior year at Sonora High School, and she hopes to at least finish the year there. Dad now has an auto mechanic job and a girlfriend, Zelda, both of which he likes. Dad's anger lessens, and his only outbursts in weeks are opposition to getting a cat, too many Muslims, and too many Mexicans being around.

At school, Ariel's best friend is Monica Torres. Monica was the first one to say hello to her when Ariel was new. Monica inducted her into the Freak Club (a clique for kids who are different, such as being gay). Sonora is a conservative town, but mostly accepting of those who are different. Monica is a lesbian of Mexican heritage. Ariel explains that at first she did not want to be friends with a lesbian since Ariel's mother left her and her father for another woman. But, she gave Monica a chance, and they got along. Only Monica knows about Ariel's home life. Despite Dad's flaws, Ariel knows she is loved and protected by him, and she loves him in return.

Ariel, who is tall and thin, wishes she had Monica's curves. She hopes eating tamales will help. Monica knows exactly who she is in the world, and Ariel is just starting to figure things out about herself. Monica and Ariel have another friend, Syrah, who comes over for dinner. Syrah brings vodka and marijuana. Her mother is an alcoholic, and her brother is a crackhead. Syrah's parents are divorced, and her father has gone straight-edge and remarried a Christian woman.

The three girls go out back to drink and smoke. Syrah explains she misses her dad's drinking because he was a cool drunk. Syrah cannot stand her stepmother because she fusses over their twins and wants Syrah to straighten out. With the exception of Monica's bad habits, Monica and her family are good, adhering Catholics. Ariel hates her own mother, and insists on the three of them getting drunk.

Ariel reflects on being close with Monica, but Ariel does not want to be a lesbian because of her mother leaving Dad and her for another woman.



Garrett Cole and Keith Connelly, third-string football players at school, come driving over and ask the girls to party. The girls laugh them off. Then, Ariel, Monica, and Syrah walk down to Garrett's house and place the empty vodka bottle in the bed of his pickup truck. Syrah gets into the cab and steals his condoms out of the glove box. This amuses the girls. In Ariel's room, the girls pass around the condoms, open some, and sink shots in Ariel's nightstand drawer.

Maya – Maya's dad drank himself to death. To attend his funeral, Maya must avoid her lunatic mother by sneaking out of the house. Maya's best friend, Tatiana "Tati" Holdridge gives her a ride. Maya has been in love with Tati for years. Maya's Uncle Wade is handling the funeral. She recalls seeing him and her dad at Grandma and Grandpa McCabe's funeral five years ago. After the funeral, Uncle Wade gives Maya an envelope from her father with a note of apology for dying, photos of the two of them, and \$1,200.

Back home, Maya's mom could care less her dad has died, but she is furious with Maya for sneaking out. She reminds Maya that they will soon be moving to Sea Org in Los Angeles, where Scientologists advance through the ranks. Maya does not want to go, so her mom backhands her. Maya is now determined to find a way to leave.

Ariel – It is six in the morning on October 9. Ariel wakes up with a hangover and her best friends sleeping on either side of her. She remembers her father and Zelda coming in late last night. She remembers talking about the varsity basketball season with Monica and Syrah before going to sleep. Ariel hopes her dad will one day come and see her play. Monica gets into bed with Ariel and wishes her a happy birthday. The three girls head into the kitchen for coffee. Ariel considers that Monica is a lesbian. Syrah likes Monica, but she denies that she herself is a lesbian. Ariel thinks that she herself might end up being a lesbian. Dad and Zelda emerge for coffee. Dad is in a good mood because it is Ariel's birthday. However, when Zelda puts sugar in his coffee, he becomes angry. The previously sunny mood in the kitchen grows very cold. To defuse the situation, Ariel takes the coffee with the sugar. She and her friends eat omelets outside. Ariel's father often makes her angry. However, she knows he has seen a lot in the military and that he wants what is best for her. Garrett and Keith drive by, with Keith giving the girls the finger which amuses them.

Zelda wants to set up Ariel with her nineteen year-old nephew, Gabe, who works as a mechanic. Ariel wants nothing to do with him since she thinks he is too old and he is related to Zelda. Zelda also quietly notes that Mark has been looking for a car for Ariel. Zelda urges Mark to spend the day with Ariel, but Mark only wants to watch the Astros game. This hurts Ariel deeply, and her dad relents and agrees to spend the day with her. Ariel also worries that things are souring between Zelda and Dad. She knows Zelda is the only real anchor holding him in place. Dad tells Ariel to get dressed, that they are going for a ride. Ariel is hopeful this may mean they are going car shopping, even though she does not have her license yet because of her Dad. Ariel knows it is a form of control. She also knows that she will never figure out who she is while her Dad controls everything. Dad has Ariel drive to Indigency Reserve because it is apple season. When Ariel accidentally says that Zelda had mentioned cars, her dad becomes angry. Ariel defends Zelda and offers to get a job to help pay for the car. Dad does not want to hear



anything about it. He says he has failed Ariel in many ways, but he will not fail her by responsibly providing for her.

Maya – Maya reflects on how her mother’s embracing of Scientology led her father to drink and later leave. She also reflects on how her mother has been trying to force her to embrace Scientology as well. She remembers how her mother scrubbed her mouth out with a nail brush after cursing at the recommendation of a Scientology elder. In the present, Maya goes to a bar with Tati for beers and sausages with fake IDs provided by Tati’s older brother. There, they meet two guys –one named Robin, and another named Jason Baxter, a twenty-seven year-old sergeant in the United States military. Jason is much older, but Maya is very much into him because he is polite and attentive. He intervenes when Robin gets fresh with Tati. Jason and Maya even kiss, and Maya considers Jason will fit into her escape plan.

Ariel – Instead of a car, Ariel gets twenty dollars from Dad. Ariel goes to see a movie that night with Syrah and Monica. During the movie, Ariel and Monica hold hands, and Monica puts Ariel’s hand on her stomach. Ariel realizes something is happening, but the horror movie they are watching ruins the mood. Afterwards, Dad picks up Ariel and takes her home. She asks him if he ever misses his native Oklahoma and his family. He says he does not really miss it. He thinks that family is a recipe for heartbreak. Ariel wonders aloud if her mother misses her. Dad surprises Ariel by saying Jenny seemed like a good mother and woman at first and that she was the only woman he ever loved. He says he will never make such a mistake again. Thinking about the past, Ariel verbalizes something she does not recognize in her memory, about the sleigh knowing the way and telling Santa not to sweat it. This stuns her dad, who then quickly says he has never heard it before. She knows he is lying. That night, she continues thinking about the phrase, realizing her mother’s voice is attached to the words.

Before school, Dad tells Ariel to change out of her peasant blouse because it is too provocative for the dinner she will be having with Zelda and Gabe that evening. Ariel changes as required, and then heads to school with Dad. At school, the very rich Hillary Grantham –whom everyone only pretends to like –has good ability on the basketball court and respects Ariel as far as the court is concerned.

Syrah drives Ariel to Zelda’s. She asks if Ariel has ever been attracted to a guy. Ariel says she has, but she has never acted on it because she has never been in a place long enough to do so. Ariel is afraid of falling in love and of commitment because she has never experienced real commitment. She knows falling in love with a guy would anger her dad, but falling in love with a girl would be even worse. When Ariel meets Gabe, she feels an instant connection to him.

Analysis

Readers will discover two narrators in Ellen Hopkins’s novel *The You I’ve Never Known*. The primary narrator is Ariel, and Maya is the secondary narrator. Ariel’s sections of the novel are told in free verse, sometimes arranged in unique patterns. Maya’s brief



sections of the novel, which punctuate Ariel's, are told in standard prose and in a different styled font to achieve distinction in structure and character voice. Likewise, there is the short beginning about wanting to be a chameleon –to see both ways and blend into any situation –that is not attributed to either Ariel or Maya. The short passage has important implications for both as the novel progresses.

When readers meet Ariel, she wishes she could be like a chameleon, for she has spent most of her life constantly on the move with her dad after mother (her dad's wife) left them for another woman. Ariel longs for a stable, solid home. Ironically and symbolically, the atlas Dad uses for travel can find anywhere for them –except home. The time that Ariel and her dad have spent in Sonora marks the longest they have ever stayed in any one place, which Ariel attributes to a job dad likes and to his steady girlfriend. Readers should note that as Ariel strives for a way to find a forever home, Maya is constantly searching for a way to leave home, thanks to her Scientology-practicing mother. Maya is even willing to go after someone much older than she is to reach her goal.

Whether one is searching for home, or attempting to escape home, finding oneself is not always easy and does not always happen quickly. Ariel envies Monica because Monica has tremendous confidence in herself and who she is as a person. Ariel longs to be the same way. Because Ariel has moved around so much, she has difficulty knowing her true self.

Ariel struggles with her identity for two critical reasons. First, she is confused sexually. She does not know if she likes girls or not. She hates her mother for having left her and her dad for another woman. Ariel wants to be nothing like her mother. If she becomes attracted to Monica, her mother's abandonment for a relationship with another woman will cause Ariel more hesitation than it might have otherwise done. Things are further confused when Ariel meets Gabe. She feels an instant attraction to him.

The second reason Ariel has difficulty in establishing her own identity is because of her father. The author lays the foundation for a critical, all-encompassing theme in relation to the idea of identity –that abused people often do not know they are being abused. Ariel's dad drinks and hits. He is emotionally unstable and quick to anger, especially against Ariel. Ariel bends over backwards to please her father and avoid his wrath. She thinks that her efforts are necessary because she is convinced her father, despite his many flaws, loves her and is protecting her. In other words, Ariel has reasoned it is okay to be everything her father wants her to be, to submit to whatever he demands, and to justify his physical and emotional abuse because he says that he loves her. Ariel does not realize that her line of reasoning is typical of someone who is abused. She thinks that her father demands, demeans, and hits because he loves her. Her father is using a pretense of love as a cover for his abuse. The author later refers to Dad's abusive behavior as "gas-lighting."

Ariel admits she will never figure out who she is if she must always seek her Dad's approval. Yet, she lets him control everything. How Ariel will escape her Dad and find her own identity while finding a home remains to be seen.



Discussion Question 1

Why do Ariel and her father travel around so much? Why does Ariel so desperately want to find a home, despite accepting her father's constant moving around?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Ariel and her dad like. How does Ariel feel about the relationship? What is the basis for her feelings?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Ariel so conflicted about potentially being sexually attracted to Monica? How does the introduction of Gabe complicate things?

Vocabulary

wanderlust, jinx, indecency, rival, disaffection, predisposition, adjacent, frivolous, tremulous, mediocrity, impromptu, inevitable, peripherally, auditing



Pages 127 – 249

Summary

Maya – Maya and Jason have now been dating for three months, and Maya loves having sex with him. Maya will be turning seventeen in a few weeks, and she wants to marry Jason. She knows she will need her mother's consent to do so, however, but she is willing to deal with her. It is all the more important now to Maya because she is pregnant.

Ariel – Ariel now feels torn. She is attracted to both Gabe and Monica, and now enjoys spending time with them both. Ariel loves Gabe's eyes, as his pupils are circled by orange bands called central heterochromia. Gabe's mom is having a difficult time coping with his father's death. Gabe explains his dad was a good man. Being with Gabe leaves Ariel feeling half-comfortable, and half-turned on. Gabe agrees to give Ariel a ride home so she does not have to stay over late with her dad. Gabe drives a 1967 GTO named Fiona after the character in the movie Shrek. While driving, they come across a saddled, riderless horse. Gabe helps Ariel onto the horse since Ariel knows how to ride, having learned from her grandfather.

A short distance away, they discover the rider, motionless and on the ground. Gabe calls 911. Ariel discovers the rider is Hillary. Ariel calls her dad to let her know why she will be late in getting home. Dad urges Ariel to contact Hillary's parents, so Ariel finds Hillary's phone to call Hillary's dad but gets his voicemail. She then calls a woman who turns out to be Hillary's aunt, who says Hillary's dad is out of town on business. Her aunt seems more concerned with the welfare of the horse than Hillary. Hillary comes around as the paramedics arrive, and she immediately asks about her horse, Niagara. Ariel assures Hillary that Niagara will be alright. Hillary then rides Niagara the mile back to Hillary's ranch, the Triple G. A foreman appears to take the horse as promised by Hillary's Aunt Peg. The foreman is impressed with Hillary's riding skills, and offers her a job. The foreman is named Max, and Hillary says she does not have transportation for work. Max tells her to be in touch if anything changes.

Maya – When Maya tells Jason she is pregnant, Jason reassures her that everything is okay, and says it is about time he became a father. Maya's mom will not be celebrating her seventeenth birthday with her, going to the Scientology center instead. Tati is stunned to learn Maya is pregnant, and worries that Maya's love for Jason and their baby will lessen Maya's love for her. For her birthday, Maya receives two Astros-Rockies tickets from Tati. Maya then meets Jason at one of his friend's apartments. He has been drinking beer, but will not let Maya have one because he says it is bad for the baby. Jason seems different somehow, but Maya is elated when he proposes marriage to her with a ring.

Ariel – Ariel opens up marginally to Gabe about always being on the move, but does not really want to talk about her mother because it makes her angry. Ariel says her mother



never cared about her, and Gabe asks how she knows this. Ariel says because her mother walked out when she was two, and for the past fifteen years, has made no attempt to see or even contact her. Gabe apologizes and changes the subject to cars. At home, Ariel invites Gabe inside and makes him a drink. Gabe explains he rarely drinks, but will do so in honor of Ariel's birthday. Ariel explains she is operating on instinct with him because she has never been close like this to a guy before. Gabe reassures her. He explains he blew a relationship with a girl named Meredith over his self-pity after his dad died by pushing her away.

Gabe also explains he will be staying with Zelda until his mom gets out of the hospital from her breakdown. Home for Gabe is an hour away, in Stockton. Gabe asks about Ariel's romantic interests, and she explains she thinks she is into both guys and girls. Gabe asks Ariel if she is into him. They end up kissing, and Ariel never wants it to end. As Gabe leaves, Ariel kisses him goodbye. Ariel is confused, wondering if it is possible to be bisexual. When Ariel speaks on the phone with Monica, word has already spread about Hillary. Ariel confirms it was she and Gabe who found Hillary. Monica explains Hillary's dad is running for political office, and so anything the family does, or that happens to the family, makes the news. Monica reveals that if Hillary had not been found, she would have probably died. Monica encourages Ariel to come forward to reveal herself as one of the rescuers.

Maya – Maya is uncertain about getting married. Part of her is happy, part of her thinks it is a mistake, and part of her is very worried about becoming a mom. Maya's mom counsels an abortion, but Maya refuses. She threatens to expose her mother's affair if her mother does not sign her permission for marriage. Maya's mother tells Maya that she deserves every bad thing that comes from the marriage.

Ariel – When Dad gets home late that night, he is drunk and trips over Ariel's shoes. He blames her for this, and threatens to kick the shit out of her. Ariel knows her father has indeed hit her before when he was drunk. She tells him she only did as he told her to do by taking off her shoes in the house. Dad tells her to be more careful, and to get to bed. Ariel thinks about her conversation with Monica about Gabe, and how part of her feels as if she has two-timed Monica with Gabe. Ariel asks her dad for a ride into town to see Hillary the next morning, and he agrees to do so. Ariel is set to meet Monica at the hospital. She asks Ariel to bring Gabe because she wants to meet Gabe. She says she feels jealous, and wants to make sure she has nothing to worry about. Ariel agrees to ask Gabe. When Ariel calls Gabe, Gabe explains he has been hoping she would call – and that he has been craving more of her. Ariel explains the situation to Gabe, but reveals she did not reveal the kiss to Monica. Gabe agrees to go. Ariel worries that everyone may end up exploding one day.

When Ariel and her dad arrive at the hospital, there is a huge group of reporters and newsmen. Gabe tells Ariel it is all Monica's doing. Monica arrives and tells Ariel they are all waiting. A man comes forward, followed by the press. He introduces himself as Charles Grantham. Charles credits Ariel and Gabe with saving Hillary, and thanks them for it. Dad, however, looks furious with all the media attention. But, Dad cannot stop interviews and the press. Monica is thrilled with this, and tells Ariel she likes her



boyfriend. Dad is furious, and thinks Ariel has set the whole thing up and lied to him. Dad tells her to find her own ride home. Ariel cannot understand why her dad has reacted in the way that he has.

Maya – On the night of their wedding, Jason and Maya wonder what they will name their baby. Jason thinks the baby will be a boy, but Maya is not so sure. They agree on the name Casey, Casey Nicole for a girl and Casey David for a boy. While at the Astros-Rockies game sometime later, Maya feels Casey move for the first time.

Ariel – Charles makes it possible for Ariel and Gabe to say hello to Hillary. Hillary thanks them, especially for taking care of Niagara. She explains Niagara is her best friend, and she does not know what she would do without her. Ariel explains she and Gabe are there because they care about Hillary. Hillary is stunned by this, having never expected such kindness. As time passes, Ariel continues to wonder if it is possible to be bisexual, or if she is simply straight or gay and not fully aware of it yet. She knows Gabe is steady and secure, while Monica is playful and outgoing. Ariel realizes she has feelings for them both. In the showers after practice, Ariel must fight to keep from checking Monica out. On the way outside, Keith and Garrett get in Ariel and Monica's way to harass them about being lesbians. Monica stands up to them and mocks them as gay. Garrett looks ready to punch Monica but refuses because there are so many people around. Monica later reveals her sole instinct was to protect Ariel.

Analysis

The lives of Ariel and Maya become complicated as they unfold alongside one another. The sixteen year-old Maya discovers she is pregnant, and she believes she loves Jason, so she intends to marry him not only for these reasons, but to escape home. Ariel's sexual identity continues to be a mystery to her as she comes to have strong attractions to, and feelings for, both Monica and for Gabe. As Hopkins argues, finding oneself does not always happen quickly or easily. Ariel's experience with Monica, and her kissing of Gabe causes her to repeatedly question her sexuality. She even comes to consider that she might be bisexual –but she knows she can only choose Gabe or Monica. Gabe, for his part, is understanding of Ariel's sexual questioning, but this still does not help Ariel in her determination. Readers should note that Ariel's language in this section of the novel becomes especially reflective, as she constantly asks questions of herself for which she does not have any definitive answers. This in turn reflects her confused state of being.

Ariel's home life does not help the situation in which she is trying to find herself any, as her father continues to be his usual self, alternating between toleration and anger. Indeed, readers may like Ariel's home life to walking through a minefield: she never truly knows what is going to set her father off. Consider how her father gets home and becomes angry with her for his tripping over her shoes by the front door –even though it is his rule that shoes must come off by the front door. Readers should also pay attention very carefully to one particular situation. When Ariel and Gabe rescue Hillary and gain media attention for it, Dad becomes angry. Hillary cannot understand why he would be



so angry about something so positive about his daughter's role in the rescue. His inexplicable anger about the attention by the press foreshadows that something is amiss. Later, the reason surfaces for why Ariel's dad does not want the publicity. He does not want anyone to know where he and Ariel are living.

Ariel only gives Gabe hints and glimpses of what her life is like, and this underscores another important theme that unfolds. Hopkins argues that nothing is ever quite what it seems –and so Gabe does not know quite what to make of Ariel's situation at first, though he sizes it up relatively quickly. Yet, it is Hillary's introduction into the novel that underscores Hopkins's argument that one never truly knows what something until they truly seek to learn about it. Hillary's introduction into the novel by Ariel is, ironically, one of assumption: a rich, stuck-up girl that everyone only pretends to like. In reality, Ariel quickly learns that Hillary does not have an easy home life, and this gives Ariel pause about considering things the way that they seem. Perhaps most sad is when Hillary reveals her horse is her best friend. Ariel recognizes that she has prejudged Hillary – much the way that she would never want anyone to prejudge her. Indeed, Niagara becomes symbolic of the importance of getting to know someone better, and the sense of loneliness that can occur without loved ones in your life enough.

Discussion Question 1

What is so important about Ariel saving Hillary's life and getting to know Hillary? Why does this come to matter so much to Ariel?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ariel continue to be confused by her sexual attraction to both Monica and Gabe? Does she have a stronger connection to one or the other? If so, why? If not, why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Ariel so surprised by her dad's angry reaction to the press' attention she receives for saving Hillary's life? What possible reasons could there be for Ariel's dad being opposed to the press attention?

Vocabulary

bellowing, inebriated, vigil, mitigate, nomadic, wistfulness, dissipates, intrinsically, anomaly, ephemeral, promiscuous



Pages 250 – 381

Summary

Ariel (continued) – When Ariel, Syrah, and Monica get to her house, there is a used, red 2012 Ford Focus in the driveway with a note from Charles Grantham. The car belonged to Hillary and is a gift to Ariel from them both, with six months of insurance paid, and the registration in Ariel's name completed. Ariel is stunned and does not know if she can accept such a gift. Monica and Syrah urge her to do so. The biggest problem Ariel will face is her dad, but Monica and Syrah still encourage her. The girls decide to try the car out. It has a full tank of gas. Monica wonders what Gabe will have gotten, and refers to him as Ariel's boyfriend. Ariel says he is not her boyfriend, to which Monica responds she is glad. Syrah heads home, and Monica goes over Ariel's. Inside, it is only a short time before they begin kissing. Ariel feels on fire, but knows she must call her dad to tell him about the car. Gabe picks up, saying Mark and Zelda have run out for groceries. He explains Charles and Hillary's aunt were by, and offered to pay for a complete reoutfitting of the GTO; and that Charles mentioned to Mark about the Focus. Gabe explains Mark's reaction was subdued disbelief. Monica puts dinner in the oven, and then she and Ariel go into the living room. They begin by making out, then have sex. Ariel has an orgasm, and is overwhelmed and happy. Ariel promises to do the same for Monica, but Monica insists they eat first.

Maya – Maya is now very pregnant. Finances are tight. Maya has no car and no license, so she cannot visit Tati as much anymore. She has to work to get Jason to be more involved in pregnancy, as he is drinking more and more and paying less and less attention –though he does attend some Lamaze classes. Maya buys a new journal so she can begin recording things so there will never be any secrets between her and her baby; and so that the relationship she has with her child is better than the relationship she had with her mother.

Ariel – Ariel realizes she is now in a love triangle with Gabe and Monica. She realizes she is bisexual, but her problem is commitment to one or the other. Ariel also recognizes she really has no one to talk to about this situation. At school, Garrett checks Ariel out, which creeps her out. Thanksgiving arrives, and is held at Zelda's. Ariel is happy to be there because it means being with Gabe. Ariel is also thrilled her dad has allowed her to keep the Focus, but he still has not budged on letting her get her license. When Ariel pushes the point, Dad agrees to consider it. While cooking Thanksgiving dinner with Gabe, Ariel comments he'd be a good wife, but that she has no interest in marriage thanks to her own experiences. Ariel and Gabe end up kissing, and Ariel feels Gabe get hard, which excites her.

By dinner, Dad has been drinking a lot. He comments that Ariel has eaten too much and should not eat dessert, or she will get fat. Gabe and Zelda stick up for Ariel, and Dad relents, saying it wouldn't hurt, but that it is too bad Ariel looks like her "fucking whore mother." Zelda and Gabe jump to their feet in defense, but Ariel very calmly thanks Dad



for telling her what her mother looked like, and then goes to get some pie. Ariel knows she must be careful, because she needs her license. Gabe comes and joins Ariel, very apologetic for what has happened. He tells Ariel that no matter what her father says, she is a wonderful girl. Back in the kitchen with Zelda, Zelda tells Ariel that if Ariel ever needs someone to talk to, she is there for her. Ariel thanks her for this, and for Thanksgiving. It is the first time she has ever felt like part of a larger family, and does not know why she had to be the one her father shoved away. Dad passes out. Ariel asks Gabe for a ride home.

On the way, Gabe admits he misses his mom. On the way home, they discover Peg Grantham riding Niagara at the Triple G. They pull over to say hello, and Peg encourages them to visit Hillary. They agree to do so. At home, Ariel makes Gabe and herself some tea without alcohol. They drink tea, listen to music, and prepare to kiss, so Ariel leads Gabe to her bedroom. They get undressed, get in bed, explore one another, but Gabe stops from going all the way because he does not have a condom. Ariel then brings out the condoms stolen from the truck. They then have sex, and come to orgasm twice. Ariel is thrilled. But as Gabe heads home with plans to visit Hillary the next day, Ariel begins to wonder how this has changed things between them, and between her and Hillary.

Maya – In a journal entry dedicated to Casey, Maya speaks about Casey's birth, and how her father is not always reliable –and was not home when she went into labor because he was passed out drunk somewhere. Maya explains Casey was born through C-Section, and that Jason arrived only after the birth. There, she explains, he told her that Casey looked like her, but became furious when he learned she had to have a C-Section. Jason was angry, Casey explains, because she would forever have a scar, but Casey still does not care at the time of writing, because it connects her to her beautiful baby girl.

Ariel – Ariel loves sex, both with Gabe and with Monica. But Ariel worries that sex will be expected by Gabe now going forward. When Gabe shows up the next day to pick up Ariel to see Hillary, Dad still has not returned home. Gabe reveals Mark is very hungover. As they drive, Gabe compliments Ariel's intelligence. They arrive at the Triple G Ranch, which is huge, beautiful, and obviously very successful. Hillary looks horrible, but she is happy to see Ariel and Gabe. They learn that only three people live at the Triple G: Hillary, her dad, and her aunt, but her dad is often away in Sacramento on business where he works in law and is running for State Attorney General. Hillary reveals her mother and older brother are dead, killed by the terrorists on September 11. Hillary also takes the time to genuinely and profusely thank Ariel and Gabe for stopping to save her, while Ariel thanks her for the Focus. When Hillary returns to bed, Peg brings Ariel and Gabe to the barn. She explains she was living in New York, but came West fifteen years before to help care for Charles and Hillary, and with Charles running for office, now lives with them. Peg explains all that she is, is right there.

Peg reveals that she and her fiancé were Olympic equestrians, and that she trained horses in upstate New York. Peg says she hopes that Ariel will come to work at the stables on Max's offer. Peg also agrees to help train Ariel to jump, hunt, do dressage,



and do cross-country riding. Ariel asks why Peg came West alone. Peg explains her fiancé wanted to remain in New York, and felt as if she had chosen family over him despite her asking him to come with her. Peg explains she did choose family over him in a way, but she had no other choice. She also explains that she learned that sometimes, love cannot weather the circumstances of life. Ariel is amazed by Peg's sense of family loyalty, and wonders about her own father's loyalty to her. She also wonders if her father is capable of falling in love with Zelda.

Maya – In a journal entry dedicated to Casey, Maya reveals she and Jason have been transferred from Fort Hood to Fort Bragg in North Carolina, and the change has taken some getting used to. Jason is losing his patience more and more, Maya has made new friends, but nothing is the same especially with Tati so far away. Maya knows now that Jason does not love her, and that she does not love him, and married him only as a means to an escape. She tells Casey that Casey is all she has.

Ariel – Ariel gets her license in December with Zelda's help forcing Ariel's dad into it by appealing to his boss to let him off work for a little while. Ariel knows her dad will hold a grudge against her for this, and she cannot imagine why he would hold any grudges against her at all. She thinks the main grudge he has against her, is her. Ariel thinks she and her dad get along fine most of the time, but sometimes she thinks he would have preferred to remain child-free. With her car and license, though, life improves. Ariel relies far less on her dad, and is able to work at the Triple G, keeping away from home. Ariel asks her dad to come see her play basketball on Saturday for a tournament since it is his day off. Dad says he'll try, but no promises. The phone rings, and Ariel answers. A drunk woman on the other end asks for someone she has never heard of, so she explains the caller has the wrong number.

Ariel heads to Syrah's house to celebrate Monica's birthday, as Syrah's mom is out of town. An entire party goes down which half the school attends. Alcohol and weed are consumed. Syrah flirts with Keith which disgusts Ariel. Monica and Gabe arrive. Gabe explains he saw Ariel's car outside and decided to drop in. Gabe explains he was just at the AM/PM and heard police talking about the party, and wanted to tip everyone off. Ariel thanks him for the warning. He helps her to clear everyone out. He then asks to talk to Ariel after her tournament the following day, that it is nothing to worry about, and that he hopes Ariel will be happy for him. After he leaves, Garrett appears and comes on to Ariel. He forces her into a bedroom, but Gabe suddenly appears to stop the assault. Monica and Syrah also arrive, while Keith shows up to take Garrett's side. Gabe easily manages to take both Garrett and Keith down, which horrifies Ariel because it makes her think of her father hitting a woman.

As Garrett and Keith slink away, Gabe forces them to apologize. Gabe suggests calling the police, but Ariel refuses. Her dad has programmed it into her to never call the police. Monica holds Ariel until she stops shaking. Syrah is impressed by Gabe, tells him so, and asks him if he is okay. Gabe explain she is, apart from sore knuckles. The sight of blood and snot on the floor causes Ariel to remember the unknown woman who suffered her dad's abuse. Gabe explains where he grew up, one needed to know how to fight, and so his father got him boxing lessons. Gabe explains he worked his way up to state



for Golden Gloves, but never made it because of his father's accident. While Ariel pulls herself together, the others begin cleaning up the house.

Analysis

Finding oneself does not always happen quickly, Hopkins continues to argue in this section of the novel. Ariel is still struggling to understand who she is, but of primal importance now is her sexuality. Ariel continues to question her sexuality as she is continuing to be attracted both to Monica and to Gabe. Her sexual experiences with both Monica and Gabe only further attract her to each, each for individual reasons. As readers will note, Ariel's attraction to both Monica and to Gabe now transcends the sexual: it is emotional. As Hopkins herein argues, emotions are never easy to sort through. As Ariel becomes more emotionally invested, her emotions become all the more difficult to understand. She wants to be with both, but does not know who to choose. Obviously, this comes to take up a serious amount of her time, and continues to take up a large portion of the narrative.

As Ariel and Gabe come to visit Hillary, they also come to learn more about Hillary and her family. They are all good people, but Hillary's dad's work keeps him away from home much of the time. Additionally, though they are years removed from September 11, the family is still coping with the loss of Hillary's mom and brother to the terrorists. Peg, who first appeared cold, is in reality very sympathetic as she has chosen family over romantic love, and is attempting to hold together her brother and her niece. Hillary herself proves to be a very sympathetic character as well, and it is because of her and her father that Ariel receives the 2012 Ford Focus in thanks. The Focus comes to symbolize the potential for Ariel's independence from her father. It will allow her to work and rely less and less on him. The controlling Mark, however, tries to undermine Ariel by delaying the license, but ultimately, is done in by Zelda.

Just as Ariel sees the violent side of Gabe (although it is done in her defense), Maya begins to see the dark side of Jason. Indeed, Jason and Mark have eerie similarities between them in their abusive, controlling natures. Gabe's beating down of Garrett and Keith can only remind Ariel of her father, even if Gabe was protecting her. Just as Dad is thoughtless and careless with Ariel when it comes to personal things, Jason is careless and thoughtless with personal things relating to Maya. For example, Jason is more concerned about the C-Section scar that Maya will have than the health of the baby girl that she has just given birth to. Maya is quickly recognizing her love for Jason was never really love at all, but desperation; and Jason's love for her was merely abuse. However, Maya finds true love in baby Casey. Casey becomes Maya's reason for surviving and doing better in life.

After the attention relating to Hillary's rescue settles down, much of life returns to normal. Ariel, even with a car, continues to tiptoe around her father so as not to set him off. Meanwhile, she commits to working at the Triple G, which is exciting to her because it means she does not have to be at home all the time and will have her money for which she will not have to rely upon her father to receive. However, there is one strange



circumstance which temporarily disrupts life as normal. A drunk woman calls the house asking for a specific name –a name not revealed –but Ariel insists there is no one with this name living at the house. Such a call should be grounds for dismissal, but given Hopkins's thematic argument that nothing is ever what it seems, readers are now alert. The call is a symbolic omen of truth. Who was the woman? What did she want? Who was she looking for? These questions should propel the reader forward now.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ariel find herself continuing to be confused by her attraction to both Monica and Gabe? How does she intend to handle the situation? Does her plan succeed? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion Question 2

How does Ariel's continuing friendship with Hillary allow her to better understand other people, especially in regard to the author's thematic argument that nothing is ever what it seems to be? Why does this matter so much for Ariel with respect to herself?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the gift of the Ford Focus come to be so important to Ariel? How does it change the dynamics of her life in regard to herself and in her relationship with her father?

Vocabulary

extravagant, seethed, addendum, irrevocably, ostensibly, domesticated, trepidation, repertoire, introspection, pensive, deciduous, gaunt, pallid, infamous, pragmatist, judiciously, vigilant



Pages 382 – 500

Summary

Maya – In a journal entry for Casey, Maya writes that September 11 is not only Casey's birthday, but also the date of the terrorist attacks. Maya is horrified that such a thing could happen on Casey's birthday, but Maya now feels patriotic and worried. Jason assures her everything will be alright. Maya apologizes that Casey's birthday will be forever linked to such a horrible event. She also worries that Jason will be especially on edge with all that has occurred.

Ariel – Syrah gives her mother's bed to Ariel and Monica for the night. There, they have sex for an hour until they fall asleep with each other. In the morning, Ariel wonders if she maybe overreacted in how she considered Gabe defending her the previous evening. She worries, though, that something might trigger Gabe to turn his fists on her. Ariel, Monica, and Syrah then head to school for the basketball tournament, where Coach Booker gives them a final pep talk. While playing, Ariel notices Gabe, Peg, and Hillary in the audience, but does not notice her dad. She does notice a very tall woman beside a shorter woman, smiling at her. By the end of the game, Dad still has not shown up. This disheartens Ariel. Monica's entire family is present, and they invite her to Monica's birthday celebration dinner. Ariel agrees to go. Outside, Ariel sees Gabe with Syrah, who is clearly flirting with Gabe.

It is then that the tall woman and shorter woman with spiky hair approach Ariel, asking if she and her father are the ones in the newspaper article she is holding. Ariel confirms it is her and her father, Mark Pearson. The woman introduces herself as Maya McCabe just as Dad and Zelda show up. Dad and Maya recognize one another instantly as Maya and Jason. Maya explains she is Ariel's mother and that Ariel's real name is Casey –the name from the phone the other night. Dad tells Ariel to leave at once. Maya explains that Dad kidnapped Ariel. Maya has been looking for Ariel for fifteen years. Dad says this is a lie and that Maya will just hurt her again. Maya tells Ariel she wants a chance to be her mother. Ariel angrily responds that Maya cannot just show up out of nowhere after running off with a girlfriend. Then, the woman with spiky hair puts her arm around Maya, which causes Dad to say this confirms what he has told Ariel. Ariel is crying at this point, telling Maya she does not need a mom. Dad is ready to attack Maya, but Gabe intervenes.

Ariel attempts to defuse the situation by running to her car. Ariel has no idea how to process anything, or how anything can be normal again now. She wonders whom to believe, and whether or not her father could have actually kidnapped her. Ariel receives a text message from Maya that apologizes for the abrupt situation. Maya says that she is willing to give Ariel as much time as Ariel needs.

Ariel decides to go to Zelda's. Zelda welcomes Ariel in. Ariel asks about Gabe. Zelda explains Gabe has been spending a lot of time with Hillary lately. Zelda thinks that is



something Ariel has the right to know. It hurts Ariel, but she realizes she and Gabe are not actually in a relationship. Zelda feels betrayed by Mark/Jason as well as Ariel, saying she has spoken with Maya, who revealed that many years before, Mark/Jason simply picked up Ariel from daycare and left –making him a deserter in the eyes of the Army. Zelda says that Maya claims to have been looking for her for fifteen years, and has legal custody of Ariel. Zelda says Mark has denied everything, and used horrible language with Maya. Zelda confirms for Ariel that Ariel does look like Maya. Zelda also confirms the woman with Maya –Tati –is her wife. Mark now appears a coward to Ariel.

Ariel returns to her house. Dad is there, and he has packed everything up. He says they must leave and that everything is Ariel's fault because she just had to be on television. Ariel refuses, incensed to be blamed for this. Dad backhands her, telling her to shut up. Ariel asks him if her name is Casey Baxter. Dad says that it is not her name anymore. He says Maya was leaving them for Tati. He does not deny he is a deserter or that Maya has legal custody. Dad explains that after leaving North Carolina, they were in a car accident. They were taken in by a woman named Leona Pearson in Virginia who had lost her husband and daughter in a train wreck –Mark and Ariel. Ariel had been named after Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. Since Casey resembled both Ariels and because Casey loved the movie, she was called Ariel from that point forward. It was Leona who gave Dad permission to use her dead husband and daughter's information, wanting them to live on in some way. He explains his own parents went along with it to protect Ariel and to prevent Ariel from living with lesbians.

Ariel insists she does not want to leave. She argues that her dad has used her as payback, which makes Dad think she is choosing Maya. He calls Ariel an “ungrateful fucking brat.” Ariel packs her things, but she tells her dad she is not going. Her dad switches from anger to a guilt trip, saying he knows she hates him. When Maya heads for her car, Dad becomes enraged, saying he should have killed Maya when he had the chance. This chills Ariel as she drives toward town. Garrett is coming from the other direction. Suddenly, Dad appears in his LeSabre, chases Ariel, and cuts her off, forcing her into a ditch. Ariel hits her head on the steering wheel and calls Gabe for help. Gabe rushes to the ditch. Ariel refuses to let him take her to a hospital. Gabe and Ariel both realize that Mark (Ariel's father) had probably tried to kill Ariel. Gabe helps Ariel into his car along with her bags, but he insists on her calling 911 on Mark –or he will.

Ariel calls, but she cannot confirm that she is a witness to the accident. She hangs up. Gabe tells Ariel her father is abusive and abuse is never alright. Ariel wonders if she has actually been abused all these years. She asks to talk about something different. She asks about Hillary. Gabe confirms he has been spending time with her. Ariel and Gabe agree they can still be friends. Gabe encourages Ariel to talk to Maya. He explains that Maya may have made mistakes, but she did not deserve to have her child stolen. Ariel kisses Gabe goodbye when he drops her off at Monica's.

Monica and her family warmly welcome Ariel. Ariel explains what has happened, while Monica gets ice for Ariel's head. Ariel is amazed by the love in the Torres family. She wonders if they would still love Monica if they found out about Ariel and Monica. Monica tells her they would love her, but they probably would not accept it. So, it must be their



secret for now. Ariel and Monica kiss, with Ariel realizing she loves Monica. Ariel and Monica talk about Ariel's future. Ariel has no idea what she will do. Monica urges Ariel to talk to Maya to learn more about herself. Monica explains that Ariel is actually eighteen, not seventeen, because that is when Mark kidnapped her. Ariel realizes she has been "gas lighted," meaning manipulated, by her dad.

Analysis

Readers will recall the drunken woman who called Ariel's house from the previous chapter as Ariel is confronted by Maya. It turns out that Maya's story, though similar to Ariel's, is not actually happening concurrently with Ariel's. It had occurred some fifteen years before. The call, a symbolic omen of coming truth, is now fulfilled. Dad immediately denies everything Maya is saying –but ultimately admits to his own perspective of the truth. Dad heads home at once to pack up and leave. Ariel refuses to go with him. It is an important decision for her to make. It is also one which her father cannot argue with because his own neck is on the line for being a deserter. If he is caught, he will go to prison. The situation is no longer about denying Maya her daughter by dragging Ariel around and keeping her under lock and key. Now, it is about saving his own pathetic freedom. All Dad is good for is rage before he leaves. In his rage, he tries to kill Ariel.

Dad's departure only leaves Ariel confused. The author argues that emotions are never easy to sort through. For years, Ariel had believed her dad. Even though he had so many flaws, she had always believed that he loved her. Now, she knows otherwise. As Ariel researches abuse, she comes upon the term gas lighting. Gas lighting refers to abuse as more than emotional or physical. Abuse is total control and manipulation. Ariel realizes that her entire life between the ages of three and eighteen, she has been on a roller coaster ride of abuse and manipulation. Abused people often do not even realize that they are being abused until it is pointed out, or until they are removed from the situation and reflect back on it. Yet, even knowing now her dad was completely wrong and her Mom has only been partially wrong, Ariel cannot bring herself to establish any kind of relationship with her mom.

Ariel's opposition to her mom comes from her still-held assumption that her mom never attempted to get in contact with her, even when Maya says this is untrue. Ironically, Ariel heads to the house of Zelda, the only woman similar to a mother she has ever truly known. Zelda is sympathetic and encouraging despite her own heartache. It is also through Zelda that Ariel learns that Gabe has been spending a lot of time with Hillary. This stings Ariel, but Ariel realizes she has no right to feel angry or upset, because she did not commit to Gabe when she had the chance. Yet, Ariel cannot really be blamed as she herself was sorting through her own sexual identity. The thematic argument that emotions are never easy to sort through becomes prevalent here as the author continues to construct her story. It is Monica who helps to encourage Ariel to speak with Maya, urging Ariel to find out the truth.



Discussion Question 1

Despite Maya bearing the truth, Ariel is reluctant to hear it or have anything to do with Maya. Why? Do you think that Ariel's reaction is understandable? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion Question 2

What is gas lighting? Why did Ariel not know she was being "gas lighted" until after the fact? Now that she knows the truth, what does this mean for her in the future? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Explain Ariel's emotional state after she is confronted with the truth? How does she cope with her emotions as they pertain to Maya?

Vocabulary

intuited, figuratively, boisterous, commiserate, coalesces, truncated, segue, gas-lighting, sophisticated, manipulation, distortion, isolation



Pages 501 – 590

Summary

Ariel (continued) – Ariel wonders if love is real, or if people only use each other for their own selfish ends. Ariel cries and agrees to talk to Maya, but she asks Monica to make the connection. Monica agrees, and communicates with Maya as Maya and Tati are on their way back to San Francisco. A meeting in Sonora is planned for the following Saturday. Ariel wonders if she will ever know the truth of who she really is as a person.

Gabe picks up Ariel in the morning to bring her to the Triple G. Gabe reports that Zelda had passed out from drinking the night before when he got home. At the G, Max is worried about Ariel, but Ariel assures him she is okay. Ariel later speaks with Hillary, who has been made aware of everything. Hillary is paying for the tow truck that Gabe is meeting at the Focus; and Hillary is willing to give Ariel any money she may need. Ariel also reassures Hillary she is cool with her and Gabe being together. Hillary suggests hearing Maya out before Ariel makes up her mind about what to do next. Hillary then invites Ariel to her family's holiday party the following week, and offers up her house for Ariel to stay at if Ariel needs a place to live. Hillary tells Ariel she does not have to do this alone, and that there is strength in forgiveness.

The Focus is brought to the Triple G. Apart from scratches, it is fine to drive. Peg waves Ariel over. Peg repeats Hillary's offers and reminds Ariel that regret is an illness. Ariel thanks her for this. She begins to think over the idea of forgiveness, and wonders if it is strength or stupidity. Ariel returns to her house to find a goodbye note written on the front door in Sharpie from her dad, saying "FUCK YOU YOU MADE ME DO THIS." There is still food in the house, but the alcohol is gone which she is glad for, because she wants to live on her own the right way. A week passes, and after a basketball victory, instead of going out with her team, Ariel goes home. She has heard nothing from her father, and cries for him. She does not know why. She is both angry and feels lost.

Ariel meets Maya at Diamondback Grill. Syrah is their waitress. Ariel explains she is very confused, but wants to begin with the truth above all else. Ariel speaks about her life, including school and basketball, but does not fully reveal the depth of her feelings for Monica. Maya tells Ariel she did not leave Ariel and her father for Tati, though she is indeed now married to Tati. Maya asserts that Mark/Jason is downright evil. Maya reveals she did research into Leona, to discover her brother said Leona was happily alive when she was living with a man and his little girl before Leona was found dead. Leona's brother believes Jason killed his sister. Ariel hopes this is not true. Maya says she has wanted revenge for Leona and for herself for the longest time, but does not want to hurt anyone else. She has let the police know about Leona. Maya asks to be a part of Ariel's life as an adult, and to help her follow her dreams.



Maya then gifts Ariel with a journal –the journal she has been keeping for her for all these years. It includes photos of Maya, Dad, and Ariel, all much younger. She also reveals that when Jason left with Ariel, Jason also took the family dog, Boo, because Boo was a gift from Tati. Maya explains she and Tati will be in town for a few days if Ariel wants to see her again, or meet Tati. Ariel agrees. As they leave, Maya gives Ariel her love, and says her door will always be open for Ariel. Ariel decides it is time to stand up for what is right. At home, Ariel opens the journal. Included is the goodbye note from Jason to Maya, which accuses Maya of only marrying her to escape her home life, and that she will never see him, the dog, or Casey again. Ariel now remembers how her Dad abandoned Boo many years before when stopping the car to let her use the bathroom. Ariel now wonders what her future will be knowing she has friends, Monica, and a Mom. Ariel considers she is an eighteen year-old young woman named Casey Baxter who is in love with a girl named Monica –and she does not want this to be a secret anymore.

Maya's Journal: For Casey – It is November 2001, and Americans have banded together to help one another and grow the strength of their country while the American military battles terrorists overseas in justice for the terrorist attacks of September 11. Despite this, Jason has become physically abusive toward Maya. Maya does not want to be a military wife, and wants to do more with her life and have a career. Tati visits at Christmas, brings Boo, and brings happiness and life to the house. Maya admits she intentionally went after someone older in the military because of a decent paycheck and housing, all to get away from home. It is in December that Jason kidnaps Casey, picking her up from Miss Paula's daycare under the guise of a visit to grandparents –just a week short of deploying to fight in Afghanistan. Maya admits she kissed Tati, and this must have tipped off Jason that she wanted to move in with Tati while Jason was away in Afghanistan.

Maya admits to being in love with Tati. Maya is shocked and heartbroken without Casey. Every so often, Jason calls Maya to taunt her, while Maya travels around the country trying to find Casey with help from the police. In 2008, Maya graduates college, and dreams of Casey. Maya can only wonder about how Casey is growing up as the years pass. Maya is still looking for Casey, and continuing to move around with Tati at her side. It is on November 16, 2016, that Maya sees the story about Charles Grantham's daughter being saved. In December, Maya writes that she is going to find a way to bring Casey back into her life –and the paragraph that begins the novel –about wishing for the gifts of the chameleon to be able to adapt and see both ways –is revealed to have been written by Maya.

Analysis

Finding oneself does not always happen quickly, Ellen Hopkins argues in this section of the novel. Ariel is still coming into her own. She has accepted that she is probably bisexual, but definitely has feelings and sexual attraction for Monica. Indeed, she comes to realize she loves Monica, and in so doing becomes very confident in her sexuality. Ironically, Ariel's sexuality is now settled, but her identity as a person –her name, age, history, the truth, and whether she is or is not the same person now –remains unsettled.



It is from here that the novel draws its title: Ariel is the you she has never known; and Ariel is the you that Maya has never known. Ariel wants to know more about herself, just as Maya wants to know more about Ariel. At the encouragement of everyone close to her –Gabe, Zelda, Monica, and Hillary –Ariel consents to meeting with Maya. As Hillary so poignantly argues on behalf of the author and for Maya, forgiveness is never a weakness. There is strength in forgiveness.

The last section of the novel is one long chapter which comprises the diary of Maya –a journal dedicated to Casey. The journal becomes symbolic of the truth and of the love of a bereft mother. Ariel learns through the journal that her mother was not perfect, but did not deserve what Dad/Mark/Jason did to her. Nevertheless, she still finds herself crying for her Dad –for her abuser and kidnapper. However, it can be argued that Ariel is not crying specifically for her Dad, but because of the situation in general, letting out years upon years of hurt and frustration sustained at his hands. Ariel realizes through the journal that her mother was indeed planning to leave Ariel's dad for Tati. Ariel also understands that her mother has never stopped looking for Ariel for the last fifteen years. Ariel is deeply moved by this, recognizing that only through forgiveness can the past be made up for, and hurt begin to be healed. Emotions are never easy to sort through, even when the truth is patently known, Hopkins contends. Still, Ariel is determined to try to sort through her emotions by having her Mom in her life.

Discussion Question 1

Strangely, Ariel cries for her dad after he leaves her. Why? How does Ariel come to cope with the abandonment of her father? Why does this matter?

Discussion Question 2

Hillary argues that there is strength in forgiveness. Does Ariel agree or disagree with this concept? Give support from the text.

Discussion Question 3

What eventually convinces Ariel to go and meet with Maya? What is the result of the meeting?

Vocabulary

counterintuitive, forgiveness, subterfuge, permeates, immersing, sociopath



Characters

Ariel

Ariel Pearson (also known as Casey Baxter) is one of two narrators in the novel. Tall, thin, and pretty, seventeen year-old Ariel is very kind and compassionate despite her difficult relationship with her father, Mark. Having been on the road since she was three, she is always seeking to please her father. By pleasing him, she avoids his wrath.

Ariel is seeking her own identity. Life becomes even more complicated when Ariel is attracted to a boy named Gabe and her friend, Monica. Ariel spends much of the novel wondering if she is a lesbian.

When Maya (Ariel's mother) enters Ariel's life after fifteen years of being absent, Ariel is stunned because she has been manipulated by her father into believing that Maya never cared about her. In reality, Ariel's father kidnapped Ariel all those years ago. He and Ariel have lived life on the run to keep Maya from finding them.

Ariel's limited identity is thrown off by Maya's outward appearance. Ariel struggles with forgiveness and accepting the truth. Hillary and Monica encourage her to forgive and accept. As the novel ends, Ariel vows to be more courageous and to strive to always do the right thing.

Dad/Mark Pearson/Jason Baxter

Dad is Ariel's father. His birth name is Jason Baxter. However, Dad goes by the assumed name, Mark Pearson, to keep Maya from finding him and Ariel. Dad is a heavy drinker who is emotionally and physically abusive, Dad has been on the run with Ariel for the last fifteen years. He had kidnapped his daughter Ariel from Maya after learning that Maya was leaving him for a woman.

Dad seems to settle down in Sonora because he lands a stable mechanics job he enjoys. He is seeing a woman named Zelda. Eventually, Dad is confronted by the truth of the past when Maya shows up after seeing a story in the newspaper about Ariel helping to save a friend's life. Dad denies everything. He goes so far as to try to kill Ariel by running her off the road before fleeing town to save his own neck.

Monica

Monica Torres is the seventeen year-old best friend of Ariel. As a Mexican-American, Catholic, and a lesbian, Monica is very confident in who she is as a person. She is attracted to Ariel. Through the course of the novel, Monica begins a sexual relationship with Ariel. It is Monica who encourages Ariel to find out who she is by reaching out to Maya. It is also Monica who remains by Ariel's side regardless of what happens.



Gabe

Gabe is the nineteen year-old nephew of Zelda and sexual partner of Ariel. Gabe is kind, thoughtful, muscular, and very strong. Gabe comes to Ariel's rescue when she is almost sexually assaulted. Gabe also helps Ariel save Hillary's life. Gabe encourages Ariel to hear Maya out. He later ends up in a relationship with Hillary. By the end of the novel, Gabe and Ariel are just friends.

Syrah

Syrah is one of Ariel's two best friends. Ariel describes Syrah as a lesbian in denial. Syrah's mother is an alcoholic, and her brother is a drug addict. Syrah herself appears headed down the same path. She rejects her family's Christian faith.

Maya

Maya is the mother of Ariel (Casey). As a sixteen year-old girl, Maya was anxious to escape her lunatic Scientologist mother. She believed marriage was the way out. She pursued twenty-seven year-old Jason. Maya became pregnant by him and married him. Soon she had regrets as his drinking, abusive behavior, and controlling nature began to wear on her.

Eventually, Maya planned to leave Jason for Tati, her best friend, while Jason was away in Afghanistan. However, Jason spoiled the plan by kidnapping Casey and fleeing. For fifteen years, Maya and Tati pursued any clues they could across the country to find Casey. they had no luck until Casey (now known as Ariel) helped save Hillary's life. Ariel's heroic story was printed in the newspaper. Maya saw the story.

In the present, Maya is determined to do whatever she must to have a relationship with her daughter. She gives Ariel (Casey) the journal she has kept for the past fifteen years. Maya hopes that it will help her daughter fill in the missing pieces of the past.

Tatiana

Tatiana (Tati) is the best friend and wife of Maya. Tati planned to leave Jason for Tati, and it was Tati who for fifteen years moved around the country with Maya to find Casey. In the present, Tati encourages and supports Maya's efforts to reconnect with Casey.

Zelda

Zelda is the long-term girlfriend of Mark, the aunt of Gabe, and the only real mother figure that Ariel has ever known. Zelda is kind, gentle, sweet, and very motherly. It is Zelda who often intervenes on Ariel's behalf with Mark. She helps Ariel get a driver's

license. Zelda is devastated when she learns the truth about Mark, but she encourages Ariel to learn the truth and meet with Maya.

Hillary

Hillary Grantham is a beautiful, wealthy seventeen year-old girl who becomes a friend of Ariel's. Hillary, despite her background, has a difficult home life. Her mother and brother were killed on 9/11. Her father, though loving and kindhearted, is away from home most of the time. Hillary relies only on her Aunt Peg and on the friendship she develops with Ariel and Gabe after they save her life. Hillary ends up in a relationship with Gabe, and she encourages Ariel to forgive Maya and let go of the past.

Peg

Peg Grantham is Hillary's aunt. At first, Peg seems cold and distant. However, in reality, she is living with a broken heart. After 9/11, Peg moved to California to be with her family, losing her fiancée in the process. Peg turns out to be deeply sympathetic and kind, ensuring Ariel has both a job and a place to stay if needed through Ariel's difficult, unfolding situation.



Symbols and Symbolism

Maya's journal

Maya's journal symbolizes the truth and love of a bereft mother. Journal entries form several chapters in the novel and comprise the lengthy final chapter of the novel. In the journal, Maya recounts the truth about meeting and marrying Jason Baxter. She tells about her plans to leave Jason, as well as her love for Tati.

After Jason kidnapped Casey (Ariel), Maya made entries in the journal about trying to find her daughter. The journal demonstrates just how much Maya loved Casey and proves how hard Maya searched for her.

Atlas

Ironically, an atlas symbolizes directions to everywhere except home. Dad uses an atlas to find the next place for him and Ariel to stay as they travel the country on the run.

Atlases find places, but they do not find the permanent home that Ariel wants. Ariel knows that a permanent home will probably never happen until she is old enough to care for herself.

Phone call

Ariel receives a phone call from a woman who is drunk and asks for Casey. Ariel explains there is no Casey present. Later, Ariel recognizes Maya as the caller. The call foreshadows the arrival of the truth about Ariel's past. Ariel is glad for the truth, but it turns her life upside down. It also causes her to question her limited amount of self-knowledge, which she was just beginning to piece together as a seventeen year-old.

Gabe's request to talk

Gabe's request to talk foreshadows a change in his relationship with Ariel. At Syrah's party, Gabe explains he needs to talk to Ariel about something, but that it is not bad. It is later revealed that Gabe wanted to speak to Ariel about seeing Hillary. Ariel is a little taken aback at first by this, but later encourages Gabe in his relationship with Hillary because it allows Ariel free and clear to focus on Monica.

Niagara

Niagara is Hillary's horse. Niagara symbolizes unconditional friendship that allows one to be their authentic self. Hillary explains her horse is her best friend because people



are only interested in her family's wealth and fame. Niagara gives Hillary companionship and unconditional acceptance with no interest in Hillary's financial or social status.

Driver's license

A driver's license symbolizes independence. When Zelda convinces Dad to consent to Ariel getting a driver's license, Ariel is thrilled. It means she will be able to work, earn her own money, and become less dependent on her controlling father. It will help her to further understand herself as a person, and it will allow her to escape from home should it ever be needed.

Ford Focus

The Ford Focus symbolizes independence. The Focus is gifted to Ariel after she saves Hillary's life. The Focus will allow Ariel to work and get away from her Dad as needed.

The red color of the car symbolizes the unfolding, heartfelt friendship that develops between Ariel and Hillary.

Press coverage

Press coverage symbolizes the threat of exposure. When Ariel and Gabe save Hillary's life, Monica makes sure Charles knows who has saved his daughter's life –which in turn leads the press to converging on the story and featuring articles, photos, and interviews with Ariel and Gabe. This enrages Dad, because it means his secrets could be exposed with his face plastered all across the country. The press coverage does ultimately lead to the destruction of Dad's lies and his complete and total exposure as a criminal and a horrible human being.

Triple G job

A job at the Triple G symbolizes adulthood. Ariel's job at the Triple G is a step forward in her journey toward adulthood. With the job, she can earn her own money. She can rely less on her father. When her father leaves, it ensures that Ariel will be able to take care of herself, because she has a stable source of income that will expand after basketball season ends and her free time for work increases.

Jason's goodbye notes

Jason's goodbye notes demonstrate the true, vindictive, and cruel nature of the man. Jason curses both Maya and Ariel (Casey) when he flees them both, respectively. He slams them personally and leaves them with anger and hatred, as well as a threatening

demeanor. Ariel recognizes these are true glimpses into Jason's inner nature and that he was never the man she thought she knew.

Chameleon

A narrator begins the novel by wishing for the gifts of the chameleon –to adapt and see two ways. Chameleons change color to blend in with their surroundings for protection. Ariel is constantly reinventing herself to please her father. Changing to please him protects her from his wrath.

Also, even after learning that her father has lied to her for fifteen years, Ariel still sees her father from two different perspectives. Yes, he is an abusive, cruel liar. Yet, he has protected and cared for her when no one else was around to do so.



Settings

Sonora

Sonora is a small, conservative town in California. Ariel and Dad settle in Sonora for a longer period than in any other town over the last fifteen years. Ariel likes Sonora, for she has friends and a social life at school. She hopes to at least be able to finish her junior year there before her father decides to move. Sonora is where Ariel saves Hillary's life, and it is where Maya is able to track Ariel down through the press coverage.

Monica's house

Monica's house is located not far from Ariel's house. Monica's house is a warm and inviting place for Ariel. Monica's family values their faith, their love, and their acceptance of one another. Ariel spends much of her time at Monica's house, exploring her romantic feelings and sexual inclinations toward Monica. She also receives much-needed emotional support from Monica and her family.

Triple G Ranch

The Triple G Ranch is the home and business of Hillary Grantham, her father Charles, and her Aunt Peg. Cows and horses are raised there. The ranch has made the Granthams wealthy people. The family is kind to Ariel. It is through this family that Ariel discovers that money has nothing to do with kindness.

The Granthams rally around Ariel in her times of difficulty. Eventually, Ariel works at the ranch. She begins to feel like an adult through her work and her friendship with the Grantham family.

School parking lot

The school parking lot becomes symbolic of chaotic movement. In parking lots, cars come and go. When Ariel is confronted by Maya, the truth, and her Dad, Ariel does not know which way to go. She does not know whom to believe. Ariel now finds herself in a place where she can head in any direction, just as anyone might from a parking lot. Her life is no longer stuck in park. Her future is now up to her.

Fort Bragg

Fort Bragg, North Carolina, is the military installation where Jason and Maya live when Jason decides to kidnap Casey. It is in Fort Bragg that Jason's true nature becomes

apparent and where Maya decides she must leave him for Tati. Fort Bragg becomes a place of heartbreak for Maya after Jason kidnaps their young daughter, Casey, whom Jason renames Casey. Fort Bragg is also the launching point for Maya's search for Casey.



Themes and Motifs

Finding oneself is a process that takes time.

Finding oneself is a process that takes time. The amount of time it takes varies from person to person. In Ariel's case, finding herself is particularly difficult given her circumstances.

It is from this search for identity by Ariel that the novel draws its name. The *You I've Never Known* is demonstrated twofold. Ariel has never known herself; and Maya has never known Ariel (Casey) because Ariel had been kidnapped. Early in the novel, Ariel has great confusion about her own identity for two reasons. First, she has spent so much time moving around with her dad that she was never able to commit to any school or social activities like most young people. Ariel and her dad moved so quickly from place to place that it was difficult to make and keep friends. It is easily understood why Ariel looks at someone like Monica as a role model for believing in oneself and knowing oneself.

The second reason why Ariel struggles with her identity is because of her sexuality. Ariel realizes she has romantic and sexual feelings for Monica. These are confused by the anger she feels because her mother left her and her father for another woman. If there is one thing Ariel does know about herself, it is that she wants to be nothing like her mother. Confusing things even more are Ariel's feelings –both romantic and sexual –for Gabe. Such a large portion of the novel is devoted to Ariel's consideration of her sexuality that there is little room for plot.

Interestingly, it is only through meeting Maya that Ariel learns the truth about the past. It is only with knowledge of the past that Ariel is able to make any true determinations about who she is. She now knows her real name, real age, and real history. She also knows what her mother went through for the past fifteen years.

Ariel resolves to be more courageous about doing the right thing (such as in dealing with Garrett) and refusing to keep secrets (such as about her and Monica). She also comes to realize she has the power and strength to forgive. So, she tries to get to know Maya better. At last, Ariel is taking steps in the process toward finding herself.

Nothing is ever quite what it seems.

Nothing is ever quite what it seems. Among the many common themes and elements of the novel, deception and misunderstanding are key. Nothing around Ariel is quite what it seems.

From all appearances, Ariel and Dad have been on the road for fifteen years in anger and heartbreak after Ariel's mom left them for another woman. Dad (despite his many flaws, penchant for control, and history of violence) claims he loves Ariel, and Ariel



believes him. She spends much of the novel rationalizing and excusing his abuse and behavior. This only prolongs Ariel's own suffering. Yet, Ariel learns that everything she thought she knew is not true at all. Her name and age are not even what she has been led to believe. Her father is not protecting her from the past. He is hiding her from the past because he kidnapped her.

All along, Ariel has believed her mother hated her. In reality, her mother has spent fifteen years trying to find her. Her mother is not a perfect person, but she is a good mother –and Ariel decides to give her a chance, especially in lieu of the truth about her father and his sudden disappearance from town following his running Ariel off the road. The discovery that nothing is what it seems also helps Ariel to realize that her time with her father was not the stuff of a loving father-daughter relationship, but outright abuse and manipulation (gas lighting).

At the same time, Ariel also comes to understand that misunderstanding does not end with herself, or her father's deception. Ariel misunderstands others, such as Hillary. Ariel originally writes Hillary off as a nice rich girl who nobody actually likes –but later comes to admit she was very wrong about Hillary. As Ariel learns about Hillary's difficult life – from her loving but constantly working father to her dead mother and brother to her heartbroken aunt –Ariel realizes that Hillary is very lonely and sad. She also realizes that Hillary and her family are wonderful people, and that people cannot be judged by how much money they have. Because of this, Ariel becomes good friends with Hillary, and Hillary helps encourage Ariel in forgiveness.

Abused people often do not realize they are being abused until it is pointed out to them.

Abused people often do not realize they are being abused until it is pointed out to them. Quite often, this is because of gas lighting. Gas lighting is the willful manipulation and deception of someone. Another reason that someone might not recognize being abused is because the person has no real context or objectivity in the situation. In Ariel's case, it is both.

Early in the novel, Ariel explains she has spent the vast majority of her life, moving around with her father whenever he wants to go and wherever he wants to go. Ariel is operating under the deception that her mother left them; that her mother does not care about them; that her father is the only one who really cares and loves her; and that everything he does, he does to protect her. Because Ariel has no real alternatives to compare her own situation to contextually, she accepts what her father says because the simple evidence at hand upholds what he says. Her father is there, but her mother is not.

Because of this, and because Ariel does not like incurring his wrath, she is usually very submissive, and does all she can to please him and do what he wants. She knows he drinks too much, is too controlling, and can be verbally and physically abusive –but she excuses this behavior because she believes he loves her in spite of his flaws. After all,



again, she has no one other than him to take care of her or be in her life like him. She even rationalizes his abuse towards other women as somehow not his fault.

By learning the truth from Maya and seeing the behavior of Monica's and Hillary's families, Ariel gains objectivity. Only then is she able to break free from her father. Ariel comes to realize she has been abused and manipulated and that her father never really loved her at all. First, he left her a cruel note. Then, he ran her off the road with the intention of killing her when she refused to go with him when he left town. In reflection, Ariel can clearly see what was done to her. From the age of three, she had been living a lie with her father.

There is strength in forgiveness.

There is strength in forgiveness. During the course of her junior year, Ariel's life is fraught with heartbreak and devastating revelations, which result in drama and chaos. Ariel has been wronged in many ways, and she struggles to move on.

It is through Hillary that Ariel considers being able to move on through forgiveness. When speaking with Hillary about everything that has transpired, Hillary counsels forgiveness. She argues that forgiveness is empowering, that there is strength to be found in forgiveness. Ariel has a difficult time accepting this at first –and understandably so, especially given her situation. There are two people that Ariel comes to realize she must forgive, even if she is not quite ready to do so yet.

The person who needs forgiveness the most is Ariel's father. Ariel refuses to write her father off as evil, though she does acknowledge that he is abusive and manipulative. Despite all of his flaws and cruelties, she still managed to survive, and he still managed to take care of her the best he could despite his hideous nature. Interestingly, Ariel cries for her father after he leaves –though it may be argued she is crying for the situation and much less for the man himself. In a way, crying is a kind of forgiveness because it represents sympathy, which Jason does not deserve..

Ariel must also forgive her mother. While it is true that Ariel's mother did not abandon Ariel, it is also true she had been planning to abandon Jason. While Ariel's mother had a good reason to do so, the manner in which it occurred only destabilized the situation even more. It gave Jason a reason to kidnap Ariel and flee. Likewise, the abrupt way in which Maya confronts Ariel and upends her life does not help the situation. Ariel ends up reeling as a result. However, Ariel's decision to get to know her mother at dinner and her decision to meet with Maya and Tati the following day are the first steps to forgiving Maya's shortcomings.

Emotions are never easy to sort through.

Emotions are never easy to sort through. Emotions range and vary based on situations. In the case of confusing situations, the emotions are even more difficult to understand. In the novel, Ariel is plagued by a range of confusing and conflicting emotions.



When it comes to her father, Ariel is torn. She loves her father, and believes he loves her. She wants more independence, but knows her father is trying to protect her. She also knows he is too controlling, and does not want to anger him –though she longs for a better relationship with him. When she learns the truth about the past and that she has been gaslighted, Ariel is sickened and confused. She even cries with respect to her father after he leaves, though she does not know exactly why. She has every right to feel angry, but she is also very sad about how things have turned out.

Ariel is also conflicted about her own identity and the situation at hand with Maya. Ariel had long believed she was a seventeen year-old girl named Ariel whose mother had abandoned her, when reality is an eighteen year-old girl named Casey who was kidnapped at the age of three. Ariel is torn between feeling that she is Ariel, and feeling that she is really Casey. She is also emotionally conflicted about Maya given the way that May has handled so much in her own life, especially where it relates to Ariel.

Perhaps, the greatest source of emotional confusion for Ariel is her sexuality. She spends the majority of the novel attempting to figure out her sexuality. She is romantically and sexually attracted to both Gabe and Monica. She does not know whether she is straight, bisexual, or a lesbian –and does not know who has more of her heart (Monica or Gabe). Ariel sexually experiments with both, and her love of sex with both Gabe and Monica only further confuses her. Therein emotionally torn, it is only when Gabe goes after Hillary after getting tired of waiting for Ariel that Ariel realizes it is Monica she actually loves, and her emotions are straightened out.

Styles

Point of View

Ellen Hopkins tells her novel *The You I've Never Known* from the first-person, limited-omniscient perspectives of Ariel and Maya. Ariel and Maya have similar experiences, both dealing with Jason, and while their stories are eerily similar, they are also distinct. There is no one better to give these two a voice to their own stories other than themselves. Hopkins knows that people in abusive situations rarely feel like they have their own voice. Thus, the author allows the victims of Jason to narrate their own stories. This ensures that victims who may be reading the novel realize that they also have a voice.

Much of what a victim of abuse suffers is internalized. Ariel is opposed to speaking too openly about herself. The same is true of Maya, who commits everything to a journal. Readers gain a very intimate, firsthand look at what a victim will suffer in an abusive relationship. The narrative itself is also restricted in the sense that neither Ariel nor Maya can see beyond their own peripheries. Neither knows what has become of the other, and so the narrative adopts a limited-omniscient, real-time perspective. Because everything is happening in the present (for each at their respective times), neither can see into the future. They can only look back at what they know through experience. This makes for greater drama when Maya finally meets Ariel and their stories collide.

Language and Meaning

Ellen Hopkins tells her novel *The You I've Never Known* in present-tense. The language is poetic and reflective. Since the novel is being told by both Ariel and Maya, who are undergoing abuse at their respective points in life, it is only natural that the author uses present tense as simultaneous events unfold.

Both Ariel and Maya reflect intensely on the things that are happening to them, and their language becomes questioning and curious, as well as highly analytical. Consider, for example, on Page 412 where Ariel has learned about her past identity and is questioning her present identity: "Casey Baxter./ Are you a part of me?/ Are you who I am?"

The poetic nature of the language makes sense because both Ariel and Maya are sensitive, compassionate, and perceptive people. Ariel's narrative appears as free verse poetry, while Maya's sections appear as standard, written prose in the form of journal entries where she is free to explore her thoughts and situations. A journal is the ideal place for Maya to confide for a fifteen year time period.

Structure

Ellen Hopkins divides her novel *The You I've Never Known* into unnumbered, alternating chapters told either by Ariel or Maya, respectively. Chapters of the novel told by Ariel are very long, often dozens of pages in length at a time. They are told in free-verse poetry. This helps distinguish her sections from chapters told by Maya, which appear in standard prose.

To further help to distinguish between the two narrations, different fonts are used for Ariel and Maya, respectively. Both the stories of Ariel and Maya are told concurrently, as if they are occurring at the same time. Eventually, the author makes clear that both stories, though very similar, occurred about eighteen or nineteen years apart. The two distinct stories form the same overall story of two abused women struggling against an abuser. They are struggling to find themselves as well. The person never known by Ariel is herself. Ariel (Casey) is the person never known by her mother. The title of the novel refers to these unknown identities.



Quotes

Oh, to be given the gifts/ of the chameleon!
-- Maya (n/a)

Importance: Chameleons change colors. It is appropriate that these words begin the novel and give the readers a taste of what they are about to encounter. There will be deception, hard feelings, and the struggle to accept oneself rather than merely blending in and going with the flow to fit in. There will also be a challenge to see things from more than one perspective. The appearance of being all good or all bad is not necessarily reality. Thus, Ariel will have to struggle to see things from other points of view.

Two whole summers, one complete/ grade, well, that's a record, and/ I'm praying I can finish my junior/ year here, too.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: Ariel's entire life requires chameleon-like abilities. She and her Dad are constantly moving around, never staying in the same place for long. However, they have seemed to have settled in Sonora. Dad has taken on steady work there, and he has a steady girlfriend. Ariel hopes that the job and the girlfriend are enough to keep them in the same place so she can at least finish her junior year of high school.

Monica/ knows exactly who she is./ I'm just starting/ to figure out me.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: Monica, a Mexican-American teenage lesbian, has self-confidence. Ariel admires Monica for her confident attitude. Ariel wishes for the same kind of confidence. She hopes that one day she will be so brave. Ariel is only just starting to figure out who she is, mostly because she has had to change so much with moving around the country so frequently.

I'll never figure out/ who I am and what/ I want from life/ if I keep relying/ on Dad's input.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: Ariel realizes that a large part of her inability to understand herself is because she keeps trying to be who her dad wants her to be. Dad is erratic at best, so Ariel is submissive and tries to please him. Then, Dad changes, and he cannot always be placated the same way twice. This is compounded by the frequent moves. Ariel knows she will never figure out who she is if she is trying to be who her dad wants her to be.

Petrified/ of falling all the way in love./ Lacking anything like a role/ model, commitment isn't/ something I understand.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: As Ariel considers Monica and Gabe, she realizes that her lack of stability



in life and moving from one place to another means she has never really committed to much of anything. Love is a commitment. Ariel worries if she will ever be able to love because she has never made a commitment of that magnitude. Ariel does not know if she is capable of love, but it seems like she is being pulled in that direction toward both Gabe and Monica.

I kissed a boy/ And I liked it. A lot. Wonder/ If I'll like kissing a girl as much.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: While Ariel has long harbored romantic feelings for Monica, she is surprised to find that she has enjoyed kissing Gabe. She did not expect to be sexually attracted to a boy, but she has been. This complicates her feelings for Monica, because Ariel now realizes she likes a boy and a girl. This also complicates Ariel's attempt to understand her own identity. She does not know if she is a lesbian, straight, bisexual, or if it is possible to be bisexual.

Triangle./ Monica./ Gabe./ Me.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: As Ariel continues to see both Monica and Gabe, she is more and more attracted to them both. She also becomes sexually active with both. She realizes she is in a love triangle, and this continues to confuse her identity as far as her sexuality and heart are concerned. Ariel's confusion forms a major part of the middle part of the novel.

You're really all I have.
-- Maya (Maya)

Importance: When Maya gives birth to baby Casey, she is living in the midst of Jason's increasing alcoholism and abuse. Maya realizes that Casey is her greatest blessing. Casey is her reason for keeping on, for surviving, for dealing with Jason. With her friends far away and her family of no help, Maya realizes the only thing she has in the world is baby Casey. Casey is her mother's reason for living.

What Hurts Most/ Is I think his main grudge/ against me is... /me.
-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: Dad grudgingly allows Ariel to get her license after being set up by Zelda to do so. He holds this against Ariel. Ariel does not know why she always draws such anger from her father. She begins to suspect that his primary source of anger is her. She looks like her mother, and she is her mother's daughter. Her physical appearance serves as a constant reminder to Dad of what he claims he has lost. This fuels his anger.

I'm your mom. I've been/ looking for you for fifteen years,/ ever since he kidnapped you.
-- Ariel (Maya)

Importance: After the basketball tournament, Ariel is stunned to be confronted by Maya.



Maya introduces herself as Ariel's mother. She explains Ariel's real name is Casey. She tells Casey that she was kidnapped many years before by her father. Ariel is stunned, especially when her father confirms this all as true. Ariel's world is shattered. So very little of what she had always believed is true. She realizes that she has been abused for more than a decade by her father, not loved by him.

Casey Baxter./ Are you a part of me?/ Are you who I am?

-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: Ariel considers that she is not actually Ariel at all. She is really Casey Baxter. Ariel wonders if her true identity is actually Casey. She questions whether it is Casey who lives inside her. She wonders how this will affect her whole life. Ariel knows that many things about her –such as her love of Monica, horses, and basketball –will not change. However, her name, age, and history are suddenly very different from what she has believed for all of her life. This encourages her to be brave and seek out the truth. As a result, she learns more about her moral character and identity.

It's time to stand up/ for what's right.

-- Ariel (Ariel)

Importance: After Dad leaves and Ariel meets with Maya, Ariel decides she needs to do what is right. She will give Maya a chance. Now, she will have a mother in her life. She will stop feeling bad for her father. She will report Garrett for his near-sexual assault on her the previous week. Then, Garrett –like her father –will not be able to hurt anyone else.